



S U V I R K A U L

## The Past in the Present: New Work in Postcolonial and Imperial Studies

*Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, by David Scott. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Pp. 279. \$22.95 paper, \$79.95 cloth.

*Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles*, by Saurabh Dube. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. Pp. xv + 259. \$23.95 paper, \$84.95 cloth.

*Gender and Empire*, edited by Philippa Levine. Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. x + 306. £25.00 paper, £35.00 cloth.

*A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840*, edited by Kathleen Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xv + 385. £19.99 paper, £45.00 cloth.

There are many ways in which to measure the “success” of new modes of academic and intellectual inquiry in the humanities and the humanities-inflected social sciences. Institutional visibility might be the simplest and most pronounced evidence, as for instance when universities define their faculty appointments in terms that invoke a critical paradigm (say departments of English search for professors in postcolonial theory or studies). Polemical debates precipitated by the challenging questions posed, and answers provided, by the new approach in question are another way of registering revisionary critical energies: do established scholars in various fields feel the need to defend existing protocols, to recognize that normative ways of doing disciplinary work are being shown to be limited or even mistaken? Along the same lines, since so much of our understanding of a discipline is derived from a sense of the debates that exemplify its

most lively intellectual energies, the power of new modes of inquiry might be gauged from the way in which they enable changes in the everyday practices of the discipline, or of subfields within disciplines (as when historians of eighteenth-century Great Britain recognize that the domestic economy, culture, and society of the nation cannot be studied in isolation from its commercial and colonial adventures overseas). Finally, perhaps the greatest measure of the power of any analytical mode is its incorporation into, or rather normalization as, the mainstream forms of academic practice—for example, when close reading is understood as the *sine qua non* of literary criticism.

Similarly, we can read evidence of the state of colonial and postcolonial studies in a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary practices. Departments of literary studies—those that deal with the literatures of the modern European imperial nations—are now home to faculty whose work either directly considers the cultures of colonialism or engages with the foundational genealogy of contentious debates about the power of colonialism to craft the culture of both colonizers and those colonized. While departments of history have been much slower to encourage parallel methodological developments, there is no shortage of historians of early modern and modern empire, including those whose forms of postcolonial critique are typified by the work of the Subaltern Studies collective. While few departments of philosophy actively explore the connections between modern European philosophers and the ideological formations of empire, such work is often performed by students of comparative literature. In anthropology, critical anthropologists, especially those who have reflected upon the history of colonial ethnography, often define the intellectual issues at the core of their discipline. None of this has happened seamlessly, of course; the recent history of colonial and postcolonial studies is as contested as any, and its revisionary energies and ambitions have been, and continue to be, resisted both within and without the university.

From the moment of its advent in the academy as a set of historical concerns and theoretical meditations, most notably in the work of Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, colonial and postcolonial studies were internally contested fields in the making, constituted as much by debates within as by dialogues with other models of historical and cultural enquiry. As with other intellectual formations, such as feminism or cultural materialism, that originated in the critique of existent power relations, the political engagement and efficacy of postcolonial modes of thought became the subject of *postcolonial* critique. As is well known, postcolonial critics argued that the very temporality suggested by the term itself—after colonialism—was in effect a camouflaging of continuing global and national inequalities precipitated by colonialism and confirmed by neo-imperial arrangements of economic power after decolonization. Further, there was little consensus about some of the crucial terms of postcolonial critique—Orientalism, alterity, Manichaean difference, hybridity, the subaltern—or about

the ways in which such concept metaphors should guide reassessments of the relations between imperial centers and colonized spaces, or indeed of the mutations of power relations and social formations within the metropolis or the colony. For instance, wide conceptual and ideological gaps separated those who focused on the discursive forms of colonial self-making and those who emphasized the power of institutions and policies of governance in the colonies. Critical attention was also drawn to the fact that much postcolonial theory was being produced by intellectuals from the ex-colonies who now worked in the Western academy (thereby adding a soupçon of glamour and gossip to these debates); their professional location was seen to render suspect their analytical priorities.

This brief account of colonial discourse studies or postcolonial studies is offered as a reminder that the present state of such studies is almost as varied as the archives or materials that are their subjects. In several instances, scholars working in different disciplines, including those represented in the books under review here, no longer feel the need to rehearse their positions on some of the key debates that shaped the field twenty years ago. Others still feel the need to reengage key early statements with a view to revising them or simply as a prelude to the investigations at hand. If newer scholarship is any indication, then disciplinary boundaries are routinely crossed—indeed, if there is a spirit of innovation that still drives these enquiries, it is most often visible when scholars bring together textual and archival materials more often kept separate. Taken as a whole, the scholarly work reviewed here suggests that the study of empires and their aftermath is thriving, and doing so precisely because there is no single method that drives this work, only an overarching desire to critically understand the fissured shape of the world as it was molded by modern colonialism, and to point to ways in which those fissures continue to shape cultures and politics after decolonization.

David Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* is an unusual and stimulating departure from some of the standard forms of postcolonial inquiry. At one level it is an extended meditation upon C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins*, upon the questions it formulated, the colonized and revolutionary subjectivities it detailed, and the history of the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804 that it offered as a prelude to thinking about the intellectual and political futures of a decolonized Caribbean. At another level Scott's book functions as an exhortation to postcolonial scholarship to historicize the key questions asked by nationalist intellectuals as they defined the pathways of anti-imperial struggle, for, he argues, "an adequate interrogation of the present (postcolonial or otherwise) depends upon identifying the difference between the questions that animated former presents and those that animate our own" (3).

Scott's project is derived from a very particular sense of the Caribbean present; he writes in the "wake of the collapse" of the "socialist and nationalist futures" (18) imagined by Caribbean anticolonialists:

The acute paralysis of will and sheer vacancy of imagination, the rampant corruption and vicious authoritarianism, the instrumental self-interest and showy self-congratulation are all themselves symptoms of a more profound predicament that has, at least in part, to do with the anxiety of exhaustion. The New Nations project has run out of vital sources of energy for creativity, and what we are left with is an exercise of power bereft of any pretense of the exercise of vision. And consequently, almost everywhere, the anticolonial utopias have gradually withered into post-colonial nightmares. I think we live in tragic times. (2)

Many commentators on the state of those postcolonial nations will disagree with the Naipaulean intensity of this summary statement, but most Caribbeanists will in fact share Scott's position that the present cannot be effectively bettered by the repetition of the earlier slogans of decolonization: "The old languages of moral-political vision and hope are no longer in sync with the world they were meant to describe and normatively criticize," he writes.

Scott works with a robust sense of the power of concepts to generate social discontent; he believes that new concepts do not simply imagine "alternatives to the present social limitations" but also "shape our understanding of these limitations themselves" (5). Thus, when Caribbean nationalists generated the enabling concepts of anticolonialism, these concepts also shaped their understanding of the historical problem of colonialism per se. Scott wishes to historicize the idiom of anticolonial projects not so much in order to understand how they foundered but to reimagine the particular obstacles posed by the problem of colonialism for anticolonialists.

There are postcolonial lessons to be learned from this exercise—the priorities of anticolonial nationalists need not be ours, nor should their way of narrativizing the movement of history, or indeed their understanding of colonialism. Scott argues that this is of particular consequence because the privileged narrative form for the articulation of anticolonial desire was the romance, which also shaped the temporality of anticolonial narrative, its sense of past, present, and future (7). He is careful to state that he does not believe such an emplotment of an "emancipationist history" was a "mistake," but he does doubt "the continued critical salience of this narrative form and its underlying mythos." A different future needs to be imagined now, he suggests, and this is where James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938) comes in.

Scott believes that we need to see this powerful anticolonial text not only for the "revolutionary epic" that it is, but also for the exemplary "self-consciousness with which James connects the story of Toussaint Louverture to the vital stories of his—that is James's—time. Doing so he urges us to connect Toussaint to the vital stories of our own time" (10). For Scott, not only does James show how intellectual engagements with the past must illuminate, and derive their critical ener-

gies from, the present, but James also meditates upon a narrative form appropriate for such engagement, that of tragedy. In addition to other changes James made to the revised second edition published in 1963 (for instance, an appended essay, "From Toussaint L'Overture to Fidel Castro"), Scott reminds us that he offers seven new paragraphs that are "a very profound meditation on tragedy," that of Toussaint and his predicament, but through that on "the larger tragedy of colonial enlightenment generally" (11).

For James, tragedy is both a mode of subject constitution at a time of historical crisis as well as a reflection upon such crisis; Scott defines this dual vision thus: "tragedy sets before us the image of a man or woman obliged to act in a world in which values are unstable and ambiguous. And consequently, for tragedy the relation between past, present, and future is never a romantic one in which history writes a triumphant and seamlessly progressive rhythm, but a broken series of paradoxes and reversals in which human action is ever open to unaccountable contingencies—and luck" (13). The transition from the colonial to the postcolonial can be imagined in a variety of narrative forms, and if (this is Scott's understanding) the romance is the characteristic form of narratives of anticolonial nationalism, then James in his moment, and in ours, offers us (in tragedy) a different way to reflect upon these transitions, to register postcolonial disappointments, and to critically reimagine possible futures (51).

James's representation of Toussaint, Scott suggests, "inaugurates a new kind of individual, the modern colonial intellectual," whose tragedy is revelatory of the local cultural and political circumstances of his formation, that is, of the "*paradox* of enlightenment" as it was experienced in the colonies. Scott's term "paradox" is designed to move away from the pro- and anti-enlightenment binarism that structures some forms of postcolonial discussion; for him, the Enlightenment is the "permanent legacy" that sets the "conditions" of future postcolonial possibility and "which therefore demands constant renegotiation and readjustment" (20–21). James set Toussaint in his world in order to make clear the possibilities and disappointments of the latter's vision, and Scott paints a portrait of the intellectual and political climate of the 1930s in which James wrote in order to effect similar ends, but also to remind us that "the horizon of possible futures [nation and socialism] toward which James looked . . . define for us, two generations on, a present that is rapidly receding."

In a formulation whose terms spell out the particular postcolonial disappointments that motivate Scott, he writes: "Today nation and socialism do not name visionary horizons of new beginnings any of us can look forward to as though they were fresh thresholds of aspiration and achievement to be fought for and progressively arrived at; to the contrary, they name forms of existing social and political reality whose normative limits we now live as the tangible ruins of our present, the congealing context of our postcolonial time" (29). This means also that the great "allegory of emancipationist redemption" of black and anticolonial

politics and subjectivity crafted by James in his study of the Haitian Revolution no longer has the “critical purchase” it once did—its utopian energies cannot vitalize sociopolitical imagination today (30).

In the postcolonial present, Scott asks intellectuals to examine “whether the cognitive-political world in which we live continues to make revolution plausible to think—and think *with*—as criticism” (88). For James, the story of Toussaint had to be cast within the romance mythos and articulated as a longing for revolution—what other literary-ethical form could face up to the “totally overwhelming system of degradation and dehumanization” that was colonial plantation slavery (92)? Black subjectivity and sovereignty needed to be vindicated from the deathly grip of racist and colonialist denials of the possibility of either, and James’s “revolutionary Romanticism” (96) derives from this need.

For Scott, while James’s revolutionary anticolonialism is the precondition of postcolonial possibility, the teleology of nation formation and racial emancipation embedded in James’s meditations on Toussaint is far less compelling for his postcolonial grandchildren (so to speak). They no longer stare, Scott believes, as James did (or as did Toussaint) into the absolute negation of their humanity embodied in colonialism. Today, while the problems of racism and economic asymmetry are still endemic in a postcolonial world, the circumstances of Caribbean cognitive-political being have changed, and the revolutionary teleology imagined by James is now lost: the Caribbean “present . . . does not ring with the strong cadences of revolutionary anticipation”; it is in fact characterized by “a profound skepticism about the teleologies of nationalist and socialist liberation in which those cadences rang” (97).

In reflecting upon *The Black Jacobins* in 1971, James said he would have written it differently had he written it then. He would have made the history of the Revolution less a history of Toussaint’s heroism and would have emphasized less the Enlightenment origins of Toussaint’s self-making. Scott notes that such changes (conceived no doubt in response to the cultural-nationalist assertions of black and Africanist scholars and insurgents in the 1960s) would have resulted in a less elitist and Eurocentric narrative, but then reminds us that James’s portrait of Toussaint features him “as a conscript—rather than a resisting agent—of modernity” (107).

Scott has a larger point to make via his understanding of the conscripts of colonialism (or of modernity): such a notion of “conscriptation” is different from the model of resistant slave subjectivity that has animated much recent study of the forms of community that allowed slaves to survive, contest, and overcome the brutalizing force of slavery. Scott thinks this scholarship is singularly dependent on the sense of plantation slavery as a fundamentally negating force. His own interest, he argues, is in “a more *constructive* idea of the problem of power” in the New World slave plantation, which understands that the repressive conditions of slavery were also “the modern conditions . . . that positively shaped the way in which language, religion, kinship, and so on were reconstituted” within the slave

communities, which were “conscripts of that structure of power” (115). Oddly, however, the desiderata for postcolonial scholarship Scott formulates via his new conception of conscription sound very much like the program notes of much recent scholarship on the emergence of anticolonial subjectivities in colonies everywhere: “what is at stake here,” he says, “is not whether the colonized accommodated or resisted but how colonial power transformed the ground on which accommodation or resistance was possible in the first place, how colonial power reshaped or reorganized the conceptual and institutional conditions of possibility of social action and its understanding” (119).

It becomes possible to understand Scott’s emphases better when we recognize that he follows James in thinking of the Caribbean as shaped almost entirely by the “founding experience” of the colonial encounter (126)—in particular, the enforced *modernity* of the slave plantation. For slaves, there was no “*before* slavery” to return to in the Caribbean; their choice was not “between modernity and something else, but *within* modernity” (164). (This is, of course, a position challenged by commentators who have detailed the continuance of African tribal traditions in the everyday lives of slaves.) In the script written for him by James, Toussaint “embodies a social crisis, the collision of embattled and irreconcilable social forces” (163), for he belonged to a “cognitive universe he could neither simply claim as his own nor completely disavow” (155–56). In this he marks “the emergence of a new type of human being . . . the modern colonial intellectual” (163). For Scott, the tragic form of the story James tells carries within it important lessons for postcolonial intellectuals today, in that the uncertain temporality of tragedy denies us the “consoling idea that past, present, and future can be plotted in a determinate casual sequence” (167), and thus “comports better with a time of postcolonial crisis in which old horizons have collapsed or evaporated and new ones have not yet taken shape” (168).

Tragedy, understood as a critical staging of human moral and social possibility at a particular historical juncture, also allows Scott to situate another debate that he believes important for postcolonial intellectuals in the Caribbean (and I presume elsewhere)—that of the historical legacy of the Enlightenment. Toussaint’s tragic life embodied the paradox of the Enlightenment—he was made up of its emancipationist elements as much as he was disciplined by its colonialist foundations. Scott’s prescription for postcolonial intellectuals is this: like Toussaint, they “have never ceased—and perhaps can never cease—traversing” the byways of Enlightenment (192); to acknowledge this critical insight is to work toward a politics that “depends less on the heroism of the sovereign revolutionary subject and the renewal of humanity that it promises to initiate, and more on a receptivity to the paradoxical reversals that can unmake and corrupt our most cherished ideals” (190).

But this is where it stops for Scott, with a diagnosis of the malaise, the historical *ressentiment*, of the postcolonial *intellectual*. In a repetition that becomes a

wearily symptom of this malaise, Scott writes of Toussaint's "tragedy of enlightenment": "It seems to me that in a postcolonial world drained of the determined fervor of anticolonial revolution and the passionate certainty of the first decades of sovereignty, there is an untimely timeliness about these lessons. They draw our attention away from the nostalgia and clinging resentment that attaches to the fading narrative of anticolonial romance and invites us to consider, with more humility perhaps, the paradox of the conjuncture in which we find ourselves" (207).

Scott's postcolonial intellectual, contained within, and humbled by, the forceful "paradox" of the present, seems unaware of those subnational constituencies whose everyday mobilizations and politicized consciousness demonstrate the hollowness of the "progress" narratives—socialist or capitalist—generated both by colonialists and by nationalist anticolonialists (this is not to suggest, even for a moment, a political or moral equivalence between the two). This intellectual can therefore derive no sustenance or inspiration from those local (and occasionally transnational) struggles that in fact embody the most urgent ethical, social, and political imperatives of our time.

Even if it were possible to argue that all these movements harked back to Enlightenment values (and that surely cannot be the case, even in a Caribbean denuded of its precolonial history) their self-understanding, and their motivations, arise not from that history alone but from their sense of local contingencies, pragmatic politics, and futures different from the present. This is particularly true of those marginalized communities (and their number is legion) who were never quite included in the romance narratives generated by nationalist elites, even if the latter spoke in the name of the whole nation-in-the-making. But even if we consider just those nationalist elites, were they not precisely aware of, did they not struggle with, the fear that the "colonial past may never let go" (220)? Scott offers this insight as "a hard truth" for our times, but was it not most often in the name of this hard truth that nationalist leaders justified the pragmatic decisions and compromises of anticolonial nationalism, before and after independence? These nationalists were by no means devoid of class, gender, or communal (both religious and ethnic) bias (and it is arguable that these limitations, not their difficult relation to their Enlightenment inheritance, derailed their nation-building projects), but even as they spoke the language of revolutionary decolonization, all of their writings, and their politics on the ground, suggest their often agonized struggles with, and within, colonial institutions and ideals.

Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity* is often brilliant as it supplies, and interrogates, the philosophical and political coordinates of James's anticolonialism, and in his treatment of *The Black Jacobins* as one of the inaugural texts of decolonizing thought. He is less convincing when he gestures toward a critical idiom more adequate to postcolonial politics and culture, if only because he does no more than point toward that need in a moment when many groups (and even some intellectuals!) have made of their disenchantment with the master narratives of national-



ism a vibrant and engaged politics, open to tragic contingency and the vicissitudes of human agents, and forward-looking in all the ways cherished by Scott.

If *Conscripts of Modernity* is a book about a cultural geography shaped by European colonialism into a subordinated version of itself, Saurabh Dube's *Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles* studies some rural communities in India, with their civic identities and cultural practices under siege by the purveyors of enlightened modernity (whether missionaries or colonial officials) as they negotiated with their Indian and British rulers. Somewhat like Scott (but very differently in practice), Dube aspires to write a "history without warranty," that is, a history that does not necessarily share the teleological certainties of modernity (xii).

Dube locates himself within the subaltern school of South Asian historiography, and his investigations into the past are skeptical both of the "guarantee of progress" offered by colonialists who spoke in the name of the Enlightenment (as well as in the name of an enlightening Christianity) and of the future promised by elite nationalism. He, too, is not persuaded by the simple binary of colonizer and colonized, and calls attention rather to the several "entanglements" to be traced in the process by which, for instance, rural people in Chattisgarh engaged with Euro-American missionaries. Some converted to Christianity (and thereby seem to accede to empire), but Dube points to the many ways in which they configured both these regimes of religious and civil power in novel ways (22).

In conceptual terms, Dube seeks to examine "the everyday life of colonial power and quotidian configurations of indigenous authority" to reflect upon "familiar understandings of coercion and persuasion, collaboration and resistance," (25), these being some of the key terms deployed in recent historiographical and anthropological analyses of the cultures of empire. Dube offers vivid vignettes of the missionary presence in Chattisgarh in the 1860s and after—while American missionaries were not technically part of the colonial apparatus, their race, language, lifestyle, architecture, and religious culture identified them with it. Dube reads their missionary logs for markers of such overlaps, which often limited their evangelical activities, but also for evidence of their success, and finds that these missionary accounts of conversations with converted Chattisgarhis reveal the latter recasting "evangelical idioms through processes of vernacular translation" (49).

The evangelical encounter was not quite as one-way as missionaries might have imagined it, Dube shows, and resulted, via translation and exchange, in a vernacular Christianity (the evangelist as guru, for example). Not surprisingly, church hierarchies and teachings meshed unevenly (and occasionally not at all) with caste and vocational practices, and Dube details several textured examples of these conflicts, all with a view to showing "the presence of critical processes among communities of converts, entailing their particular apprehensions and

refashioning of the Word and the Book, saints and martyrs, clothing and buildings, Western notations of time and spatial arrangements of work, and missionary medicine and Christ the Savior" (74).

In later chapters Dube moves from the entanglements of religion to those of the legal system, and considers evidence from the 1920s and 1930s of the complicated "interpenetration of 'official-state' conceptions and 'community-popular' contentions of crime and criminality, legality and property, and authority and morality" (77). In each case he points to the creative interplay between individuals, community norms, and the institutions of colonial governance. The diffusion of ideas of *Swaraj* (self-rule) further complicated this picture, and even as *Swaraj* was a slogan directed against colonial rule, it also offered a moral and political model of authority that could be invoked in justification of the actions of impoverished tenant farmers against landlords (111). Once again, Dube's larger point is that the dominance of the colonial state, as instanced in the deployment of legal systems into the countryside, suggests little of the uniformity supposedly central to its institutional practices. This is not because judges or lawyers were capricious, but because these practices were reworked and manipulated by local people and their institutions of local governance.

While Dube's accounts of Chattisgarhis, religion, and the legal system make for engaging reading, his predilection for self-recursive theoretical reflection, in which he carefully marks out his distinction from earlier work in subaltern studies and in postcolonial theory, offers little payoff to the reader. At moments like these his prose, in a manner that painfully enacts theoretical difficulty and sophistication, is oddly self-congratulatory as he traces the rhetorical maneuvers that allow him to avoid this or that theoretical misconception. At other moments it is simply overwritten and enigmatic, as when he begins a chapter thus: "An immaculate conception of the epiphany of travel spells the end of memory. Yet memory strikes back—as empires have done, again and again—to be united with travel through a surplus of longing" (32).

Both *Conscripts of Modernity* and *Stitches on Time* exemplify the ways in which the study of colonialism has benefited enormously from interdisciplinary traffic: the first is written by an anthropologist whose historiographical and philosophical interests are enabled by his literary critical abilities, and the second brings together the self-presentation of the ethnographer with the historian's delight in archives. Of course, such crossovers have also been consequential in altering scholarship within humanistic and social scientific disciplines, and two recent collections of essays exemplify the new priorities of historians of empire. *Gender and Empire*, edited by Philippa Levine, is a "companion" volume to the recent five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire* (this series has many merits, but makes little attempt to interweave women and gender relations into the textures of empire). Levine's editorial introduction, "Why Gender and Empire," points

out simply and effectively that all historical analysis should understand gender as more than a “descriptive category,” for it is “a hierarchical ordering of quality, skill, and usefulness” (7), an ordering that was crucial to the culture and institutions of empire, within the metropolis as within the colonies.

Notions of appropriate womanhood and proper masculinity, both in the domestic and in the public sphere, were forged in the service of empire, and projected overseas to ensure a comparative elevation of bourgeois and imperial British social systems vis-à-vis those encountered elsewhere. And yet patriarchal forms and fantasies of authority linked domestic and class violence in England with colonial violence against women and men in the colonies. In a pointed and bracing essay (“Empire and Violence, 1900–39”) that is bound to inspire similar work, Jock McCulloch surveys the forms of violence that defined the British Empire and argues that this record needs to be brought home to any assessment of the culture of empire. Once the lens of gender allows us to look past the ideological division of the domestic and the public (with only the latter the proper subject of history), both the spectacular forms and the everyday brutality of colonial authority are sharply brought into focus.

Antoinette Burton, in “Archive Stories,” surveys historians who work on gender and empire about their experience of archives, and reminds us that the very form of the archive (and the culture of those institutions that house them) is derived from the “strategies of containment” and “disciplinary mechanisms” of the British Empire (292). She argues for the need to diversify our sense of what counts as an archive; this is one of the foundational lessons taught by feminist historiographical practice, whose processes of discovery have often lain outside conventional archives. Urvashi Butalia, in “Legacies of Departure: Decolonization, Nation-making, and Gender,” writes about the place of women in the decolonization in India and Pakistan, or rather of the process of nation formation via partition, and the ways in which each state rationalized its role as the “protector” of women, thus hardening already rigid patriarchal practices. There are eleven other essays in this well-planned volume, each of which addresses particular issues connected with the study of gender and empire: medicine (Alison Bashford), sexuality (Philippa Levine), migration patterns (A. James Hammerton), and nation formation (Mrinalini Sinha). There are two essays on family formations—childhood and race (Fiona Paisely) and missionary life (Patricia Grimshaw)—and three surveys of the interplay of gender and empire in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries by Kathleen Wilson, Catherine Hall, and Barbara Bush, respectively.

In their entirety these essays cover a lot of ground, and while they do all emphasize the power of gender difference to shape cultural, social, and scientific-technological practices in Britain and in the colonies, they do not do so without considering the role played by other axes of difference; indeed, as Mrinalini Sinha argues, analysis of the “expanded imperial context thus cautions against

privileging gender, even when it incorporates divisions of class, ethnicity, and so on, over other forms of organizing difference in the production and reproduction of the nation" (185). Without an analysis of gender relations and conceptions, the study of empire is conventional and predictable; without an understanding of the ways in which ideologies of gender are enmeshed with other modalities of power and discrimination, such analyses are incomplete.

The second volume of essays, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840*, edited by Kathleen Wilson, extends the argument made by a number of scholars that the theater of empire is crucial to understand how "Great Britain" was forged, domestically as well as overseas. This is not only an argument about the making of political systems—the incorporation of Scotland and Ireland into Britain, for instance, or of Caribbean plantations or parts of India or Africa—but it also concerns itself with the changes in all sectors of society, certainly in Britain but also in many of its colonial possessions or trading outposts. The range of such history is enormous, and its organizing principle might be understood, as Kathleen Wilson writes, as a recognition of "the importance of *difference*—in historical settings and forms of consciousness as well as in historiographic and critical practice—that supports and extends the pluralities of historical interpretation" (3).

Such a focus extends into our understanding of the very modernity that Britain (and imperial Europe) came to understand as defining its difference from the colonized world. Contrary to established historical models of the diffusion of "modern" practices from the metropole to the colonies, Wilson points out that "the most decisive breaks with established practices and attitudes occurred in the novel and culturally hybrid environments of empire, correspondingly reshaping the understanding of difference at the supposed center" (7). It is also the case that the foregrounding of the play of difference in the analysis of empire also involves broadening the historian's traditional (and limiting) reliance on political and economic data to take seriously cultural and discursive formations, a move that has certainly proved contentious for historians. The work of literary critics and historians has been very useful here, as they have cataloged the vocabulary, rhetorical forms, and images that were crucial to manufacturing the nationalist and imperialist consensus that drove the will to empire. It goes without saying, of course, that they have done the same to chart the efforts of people who differed with imperialist ideologies, in Britain and in its colonies. Over the course of three centuries, European imperialism transformed relationships between different parts of the globe, and a history that would be faithful to the interconnections between local and translocal patterns of change must be a more plastic and accommodative discipline than has hitherto been the case.

Indeed, *A New Imperial History* is that unusual genre of historical writing that makes no working distinction between the work of historians and literary critics

(there are ten of the former and six of the latter included here), and that is because each of these scholars of the cultures and practices of empire has derived enormous intellectual benefits from reading theoretical and empirical work that originates in other disciplines. It seems likely that even more than the power of particular essays assembled here to drive future work, the volume as a whole will inspire scholars to think across methods and archives considered central to their discipline.

A literary critic working on Daniel Defoe and his energetic women characters will learn much from the women who populate Margaret Hunt's essay, "Women and the Fiscal-Imperial State in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century London," which is her account of the ingenuity and difficulty with which the poor wives and women relatives of sailors negotiated with their naval paymasters, and even invented a secondary market in discounted payments in order to survive irregularly paid salaries. Hunt's essay is a reminder that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the enormous and rapidly expanding bureaucracy of the navy, "far from excluding women," forged "a rough and ready alliance with them in order to get the job done" (46). Imperial warfare is a complicated and expensive business, and requires the modern state to co-opt women as well as men in order to achieve its objectives.

Moving to another sector of English society, Philip J. Stern defines "gentility" as a motivating desire for upper-class men as they assembled in libraries, clubs, and gardens and styled themselves collectors and adventurers, consumers of the products of overseas exploration and exploitation, and connoisseurs of knowledge as well as of trade goods (118). Their associations played consequential roles in exploration and the making of empire; for instance, before the state stepped in to fund and direct expeditions to Africa, it was the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa (1788) that enabled such activity. Stern argues that it was the "economy of gentility"—made up of equal parts metropolitan club, newly institutionalized science, and commercial hope—that produced the "useful knowledge" that imperialism made instrumental to its own advance (135). As just these two essays show, little in the "domestic" world of Great Britain was insulated from the new world order being crafted in contact zones overseas.

There are many stories from the contact zones of empire told in this volume: in "Asians in Britain: Negotiations of Identity through Self-representation," Michael Fisher writes of Asians in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and offers them as a "counter-flow" that complicates our sense of Britain as an entirely white society in this period and (more questionably) as evidence that shows that European imperialism was not an "exclusively white intrusion into non-white territories" (95). Lascars and black or Asian domestic servants are not intruders in quite the same way as the agents of imperialism or of the various British trading companies, and Fisher knows this, for he keeps asymmetries of power firmly in mind in the rest of his article.

Colin Kidd, in "Ethnicity in the British Atlantic World, 1688–1830," calls attention to shifting models of ethnicity derived from the interactions of Africans, the Indian peoples of the Caribbean and North America, and British and European subjects, and makes the point that the hierarchical distinctions between various "British" peoples—Irish Catholics, Scottish highlanders, Jews, English Protestants—continued to play a role in the crafting of a British imperial identity overseas. Kidd argues that the primary debate about the sources of ethnic difference took the form of arguments about monogenesis or polygenesis—that is, about the scriptural authority of the Bible—and delineates how "unthinking prejudice and xenophobia" developed into "doctrinal racism" as part of "the Enlightened critique of the Bible" (263).

Kate Teltscher's essay, "Writing Home and Crossing Cultures: George Bogle in Bengal and Tibet, 1770–1775," is an account of diplomatic travels in faraway places and the colonial archive that is comprised by letters to loved ones. But she also makes the point that these letters brought the various theaters of empire into the bosom of the family and rendered intimate foreign spaces and extremely unusual experiences (282). "Indeed," she writes, "in the imperial context, letters act much like colonial functionaries themselves: crossing cultural boundaries, disrupting fixed notions of national and personal identity" (296), creating the textures of the new as they were reported from the field and vicariously experienced at home.

I began this survey of recent work in colonial discourse studies and the history of imperialism and empire by talking about the disciplinary normalization of some of the shared vocabularies and methods of these fields. Critical debates about innovative methods or unusual archives continue, and these debates themselves are considered valuable contributions to historiographical or anthropological inquiry, or to cultural and literary studies. What is not always clear are the postcolonial stakes of such scholarship, and that is probably because the "new imperial history" is not always practiced with an urgent sense of the present conjuncture, in which the pressures of renewed asymmetries, of new empire, make pointed our inquiries into the past. There is, of course, room in our academic and intellectual efforts for multiple demonstrations of the porosity of colonial identities, of the fluidity of transnational travel, or indeed of the paranoia and suspicions that were generated in the contact zones of empire. But there is also a particular need to make clear that we return to the study of modern colonialism in order to puncture nostalgic dreams of a Pax Britannia that might provide a precedent for a new Pax Americana, or indeed for a "globalization" that translates the more inescapable polarities of political control into the less visible logic of economic subordination.

David Scott's book originates in the enervation of nationalist aspirations in the Caribbean and argues that a return to a key text of anticolonial thought is a

good way to ask about how our present differs from, while drawing heavily upon, the legacies of both empire and decolonization. Reading the past to understand more precisely the present while thinking of a future not entirely in the thrall of either—this might be a prescription for the way in which democratic and post-colonial scholarship reexamines modern empires in the years ahead.

*University of Pennsylvania*

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